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UNITED ACTIONS BY TRADE UNIONS AN URGENT NECESSITY

A WFTU publication
based on the discussions
in the 31st session
of the WFTU Bureau
(Paris, April 1984)

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PREFACE

Reading the publications of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU)* these days, one gets the impression that the main concern of that organization is to do everything possible to keep or even widen the existing division within the international trade union movement. In fact, these publications which refer very proudly to the 35 years of the existence of the ICFTU — to the existence of the division within the international trade union movement — constitute nothing but a feverish attempt to stop the rapprochement which is being built now, and is being strengthened, between trade union organizations of different affiliations to face the major issues of today.

One might ask the question: WHY?

The answer, in my opinion, is that some of the ICFTU leaders have not learned from all the harmful consequences of the split on the workers and their basic rights.

It is now very well documented that the split in the international trade union movement has been instigated, financed and kept in vigour by elements and forces from outside the trade union movement — the elements and forces who benefited and continue to benefit from the existence of this split. Not a single worker — neither in the Soviet Union nor in the United States, in Finland or in South Africa or anywhere else — has benefited from this split. This is a hard fact of life which nobody could deny.

The trade unions, starting from industrial level to national and international levels, are united fronts of workers of different beliefs, political orientations or religious leanings. As such, there exists differences of opinion on the approach to take to this or that problem. But the key element which unites them is that the basic interests of workers as a class are the same.

As such, we in the WFTU, recognize the possibilities of the existence of differences of opinion within our ranks. What we do not recognize — in fact, we fiercely struggle against it — is to allow these differences to weaken our ranks, to cause a split in our movement and thus to put us as easy targets for our class enemies.

Through dialogue and friendly discussions, we strive to come to the right conclusions that reflect the common view of the components of our

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* *The ICFTU was set up in 1949 as a breakaway from the WFTU.*

Federation. We never try (this would be a violation of our own Constitution) to impose any restriction on our affiliated organizations. They are free, really free, to implement the common conclusions taking into account the specific realities in their respective countries. There is no wonder, therefore, that the WFTU not only includes in its ranks, which are constantly growing, organizations of different political leanings, operating in different social systems and that the WFTU is able to attract to its actions and campaigns a large number of non-affiliated organizations as well.

Maybe some years ago, some of the trade union centres thought that they alone could deal with the problems that are facing their members, their nations or humanity as a whole. This proved to be an illusion.

The ideas which were behind the desire to unite the trade union movement on international level and which started nearly a century ago and which had their best success towards the end of the Second World War by setting up the WFTU remain well-justified in our present days.

In this period of such high concentration of capital and the vast development of transnational corporations and financial institutions, in this period of vast accumulation of such a huge quantity of nuclear weapons, in this age which reveals the ugliest face of the existing «old» international economic order, in this period which witnesses the fierce bloody resistance of imperialist powers to the march of the people for their political and social liberation — at such an age, individual actions by trade unions, however strong they might be at national or regional levels, cannot be effective and cannot yield the expected results unless they are conducted in the framework of international solidarity and unity of action by trade unions the world over.

This was the main idea which dominated the discussions at the 31st session of the WFTU Bureau held in Paris in April 1984.

The Bureau unanimously came to the following conclusions:

— We are witnessing now a great upsurge in the united actions by trade unions especially at the national and regional levels; these emerged as an objective necessity for the conduct of struggles and for the success of these struggles;

— this trend could have developed and reached higher levels if it was not for obstacles which were sometimes artificially created;

— that one of the main tasks of the WFTU is to stimulate, promote and encourage this trend and strive for united actions at the international level.

We now put in your hands the proceedings of that session of the Bureau and the main ideas on this vital issue, with the hope that you, as a trade union leader, or as somebody connected with the trade union movement, know better the feelings and attitude of the WFTU and make whatever contribution you can, so that we together make out of the concept of the international solidarity of workers and their trade unions, the most effective weapon and put the full weight of our gigantic trade union movement to the services of our half a billion members and humanity as a whole.

Needless to say, we will be only glad to know your reaction to this material and to listen to whatever opinion you might express.

IBRAHIM ZAKARIA,
General Secretary
World Federation of Trade Unions

July 1984

I.

IS THERE A BASIS FOR TRADE UNION UNITY — AND WORLD TRADE UNION UNITY?

The present generation of workers and trade unionists faces unprecedented challenges. There are real and imminent dangers. There are splendid opportunities as well, to build on this planet a better life.

These challenges were, in the main, outlined by the 10th World Trade Union Congress (Havana, February 1982). The unanimous document adopted by the delegates from 138 countries representing 269 million trade unionists present at that Congress has been published by the WFTU under the title: «**Trade Unions and the Challenges of the 1980**».

The fact that the 10th World Trade Union Congress was attended by representatives of different trends in the trade union movement, including some organizations affiliated to the ICFTU and WCL (and the WCL itself was officially represented), as well as regional organizations like the OATUU, ICATU and CPUSTAL, was of great importance. The broad composition of participants at the Congress made possible the first steps towards the development of a real dialogue and debate among the various contingents of the world trade union movement.

The period since the 10th Congress has witnessed serious developments. The danger for peace and democracy has increased immensely. Mass unemployment is used against organized labour. Instead of progress towards a new international economic order, the developing countries have slided into a deep «debt crisis». Vital human rights are violated for millions of people. The offensive of monopolies against trade union rights has become more ferocious. The policies designed solely to enrich the transnational corporations and banks and their military-industrial complexes are leading to economic ruin of whole countries and peoples, as the world is being pushed towards a nuclear catastrophe.

In times of great adversity, humankind has always found means to assert the bonds of unity and solidarity, to avert the catastrophe that could otherwise happen.

There is a universal feeling today that we are in such a situation.

And in all such situations, we have always looked back to find ways of action, to learn from past experiences and to build upon the wisdom we have inherited.

It is therefore only appropriate that we look back to the extremely critical times of the 1940s, the tragedy of the Second World War, and the anti-fascist unity that was built to put an end to the forces of war and fascism. It was from that unity of anti-fascist trade union forces that the WFTU was founded at the First World Trade Union Congress which met in Paris in October 1945. A World Trade Union Conference in London from 6 to 17 February 1945 prepared for the First World Trade Union Congress which was able to forge unity in the world trade union movement. The appeal for a united conference adopted by the London Conference in 1945 had stated:

«We came together in our world conference from many lands. We represented all races, colours and creeds. We spoke to one another in different languages. But we were united upon the objectives which we, as workers share with all freedom-loving peoples. Our deliberations in the world conference enable us to declare, with emphasis and without reservations, that the trade union movement of the world is resolved to work with all like-minded peoples ...

— to establish a stable and enduring peace; and

— to promote in the economic sphere the international collaboration which will permit the rich resources of the Earth to be utilized for the benefit of all its peoples, providing full employment, rising standards of life and social security to the men and women of all nations.»

The London Conference had the foresight to warn our movement to be vigilant and be conscious of the need for workers and trade unions to actively participate in the processes for establishing «a stable and enduring peace» and to participate actively also in the processes of economic and social development. The London Conference further stated:

«Organized labour, with so great a part in winning the war, cannot leave to others — however well-intentioned they may be — the sole responsibility of making the peace. The peace will be a good peace — an enduring peace — a peace worthy of the sacrifices by which it has been won — only if it reflects the deep resolve of the free peoples, their interests, their desires and their needs. We therefore send forth from our World Conference this appeal to all the workers of the world, and to all men and women of goodwill to consecrate to the building of a better world, the service and sacrifice they have given to the winning of the war.»

And it was to achieve this aim that the Conference unanimously resolved to create a world trade union cooperation, **«regardless of race, creed or political faith, excluding none and relegating none to a secondary place».**

We may also recall in this context that the First World Trade Union Congress in its «Declaration on the Attitude to the Peace Settlement», while underlining the need to do away with the economic causes of war, stated: **«The trade union movement cannot forget that one of the basic**

causes of war is the scramble for markets by monopolizing interets». Hence the Conference stressed the need **«to investigate and put an end to the activities of international cartels and monopolies which militate against the public interest.»**

Was it not a warning which was not heeded? A warning about the intentions of the military-industrial complexes? Of the «cold war» and the «arms race» which now threatens the future of our planet?

Did we forget for some time — as some people did because of the «cold war» that «PEACE IS», INDEED, «TRADE UNION BUSINESS»?

For quite some time now, there has been an active debate going on within the world trade union mvoement on its precise role and functions, on its perspectives and there has also been a self-critical examination of its own methods of work. This was inevitable. Compared to the 50 million trade unionists in the world represented at the London Conference in 1945, the trade union membership now could be eight or ten times as much, reflecting the tremendous increase in the size of the working class. The ranks of the workers and trade unionists now consist of those who come from countries which have predominantly market-oriented economies (the developed capitalist countries), the countries which have public ownership of the means of production and centrally-planned economies (the socialist countries) and the countries which are the main victims of the neocolonial policies of imperialism and transnational corporations and which are seeking to develop and modernize their economies (the developing countries). The variety of trade union experience is thus quite considerable since trade unions functioning within different social systems and countries at different levels of development have to deal with very specific situations.

Yet, on the principal problems facing humankind, the trade unions in the capitalist countries, socialist countries and developing countries share common tasks. This was the central point of the debate in Havana at the 10th World Trade Union Congress (February 1982)

These common tasks are now well-recognized.

The 4th Conference of European Trade Union Centres which met in Geneva (November 1981) had earlier noted the convergent points on some basic issues like the struggle for peace, the problem of technological change, etc., and called for continuing contacts. The final document of the Conference had stated:

«The national centres (participating in the Conference belonging to WFTU, ICFTU, WCL and autonomous centres — Ed.) consider that the Fourth Conference has provided a timely opportunity for strengthening trade union contacts and deepening mutual understanding of common

problems and ways of tackling them in Eastern and Western Europe. The Conference affirms that the exchanges should be continued and preparations be put in hand as soon as practicable for a further conference in 1983. That conference should be devoted to discussion of trade union responses to the developing economic and industrial cooperation in Europe including the increasing operations of multinational enterprises. The Conference requests the four European worker members of the Governing Body of the ILO to initiate preparations in close cooperation with national centres.»

The 5th Conference of European Trade Union Centres did not take place in 1983, in spite of the worsened international situation and the attempt of certain forces to revive the cold war! Why is it so?

The new attempts at fouling the international situation and reviving the cold war were taken to a new pitch by the Reagan Administration, which identified itself as the most uncompromising defender of monopoly capitalism and the military-industrial complex. This Administration in the USA not only took as its enemy the socialist countries but the trade union movement in the USA itself and one of the first acts of the Administration was to suppress the strike of air-traffic controllers and dismiss all the workers who went on strike. And what was its economic policy?

The **AFL-CIO News** (14 January 1984) has published what it called the **«Statistics of Pain»** — of what President Reagan's three years in office cost the workers and people of the United States. These included:

— The number of individual workers suffering one or more episodes of unemployment during the period 1981 to 1983 was not less than 30 million. The average mean duration of unemployment rose from 14 weeks in 1981 to 20 weeks in 1983 and the average gross earnings lost per year by jobless workers amounted to 3,315 dollars in 1981; 4,005 dollars in 1982 and 5,620 dollars in 1983.

— The earnings lost during the three-year period amounted to 336.1 billion dollars and the total value of lost production was of the order of 950 billion dollars.

— During the three years of Reagan in the White House, cuts in social programmes amounted to 110.2 billion dollars. These included a 28 per cent cut in child nutrition programmes; a 27 per cent cut in higher education loan programmes; a 13 per cent cut in aid to families with dependent children; a 35 per cent cut in allocations for job-training for disadvantaged (handicapped persons); a 22 per cent cut in various health programmes, etc.

And all these cuts were made by the Reagan Administration to pay for the highest arms budgets in US history, to pay for a steep escalation of the arms race, to pay for the undeclared wars as against Nicaragua, etc. — all of which have been condemned by democratic public opinion the world over. And on top of this is the irresponsible deficit-financing and the speculative policies, including high interest rates which brought havoc on the economies of the capitalist countries.

Should such policies go unchallenged?

Should the world's trade unions remain passive and remain silent when a large part of the world's resources are wasted on an arms race, are misappropriated by the military-industrial complexes through this arms race, thus depriving nations and peoples of resources to combat poverty and destitution and to assure minimum living standards for all?

Can the world's trade unions intervene and stop this drift to total destruction?

The 10th World Trade Union Congress stated that it is possible to intervene and it is necessary to intervene.

The 13th Congress of the ICFTU also concurred.

But the question is: how shall the world trade union movement achieve the strength to intervene and influence the developments, in a decisive manner? The ICFTU Congress was rather silent on this question. The 10th World Trade Union Congress prescribed — UNITY.

United, the workers and trade unions the world over constitute a formidable force, a chief factor for social progress.

It was with this understanding that the London and Paris Conferences in 1945 decided on building world trade union unity.

It is with this understanding that we must start again to **re-build** this unity.

The 10th World Trade Union Congress stated that «in order to find solutions to the large and complex problems of the age, it is imperative to bring together all the forces which want to make mankind move forward in a progressive way ...» Despite differences and disagreements existing among different components of the world trade union movement, there are great points of convergence. These points of convergence make it imperative that in the interest of protecting workers' rights and demands, the trade unions find ways to strengthen unity and united action.

II.
ARE THE BARRIERS BREAKING DOWN?

The evolution of inter-trade union relations at various levels in the recent years has brought forth many interesting features.

In countries where there is a multiplicity of trade union structures and parallel functioning of national trade union centres exists, because of political, ideological — and sometimes even religious — differences, the need to resist the offensive of capitalist monopolies and reactionary governments has encouraged trade unions to organize joint actions in support of specific trade union struggles. There are many fine examples of such actions.

At the international and regional level, the steady progress of bilateral relations is reflected in the exchange of trade union delegations, study visits, high-level contacts, etc., as between the trade unions of various countries, irrespective of affiliation or orientation.

And there has been a big increase in people-to-people contacts, especially as between the socialist countries and non-socialist countries and this is constantly encouraged by the trade union centres.

The fact that the socialist countries in Europe receive several millions of visitors every year is an impressive example. Among them, a large number consisted of workers and trade unionists. These visitors saw for themselves the growing role of the trade unions in every socialist country.

All this constitutes a tremendous contribution to international understanding, in favour of peace, economic cooperation for social development and the promotion of a spirit of unity and solidarity among workers the world over, irrespective of race or religion, political orientation or international affiliation.

From many angles, and prompted by many needs of struggles, we can see a constant search for united action among broad sections of the world trade union movement.

Many trade union activists therefore find the present divisions rather artificial.

Even the ideologues of the capitalist monopolies and transnational corporations find this rather strange, although they are extremely happy about the trade union division which facilitates their strategy of «divide and rule». The **Wall Street Journal,** for example, recently remarked with open joy that while the big transnational corporations are operating internationally and have a global strategy, the trade unions have been by and large hesitant and timid about operating at the global level in a coordinated manner. The trade union leaders, the Journal stated, appear timid about even making an inter-continental phone call!

In a global economy which is getting increasingly inter-dependent and in a period when economic integration is progressing at various levels, the processes of coordination of trade union action in this new situation will have to assert themselves.

And this is what is increasingly manifest, in the broad exchanges now taking place at the international level, regional level and national level of trade unions making a seroius effort to adapt their international activities and reorganize and better equip their international departments in order to effectively deal with the emerging tasks in this regard.

The 10th Congress was therefore rightly called a congress of dialogue, a congress in which various trends in the world trade union movement took new steps to exchange views on their concerns and their priorities and agreed on a strategy to work for unity.

What attracted the wide participation in the 10th Congress?

What created the urge to come together, to discuss together, in a spirit of cooperation, to look for common points for action by the trade unions from the developing countries, developed capitalist countries and socialist countries?

As the report to the 31st session of the WFTU Bureau (Paris, April 1984) stated:

«What attracted the very large participation ... in the 10th Congress in Havana was the concern at the international tension which is growing further with the arms race, the crisis of the capitalist system and its economic and social consequences and the development crisis directly linked with unequal inter-state economic relations imposed by imperialism and colonialism; etc., and the desire to seek solutions and means of action.

«The global policies of the transnational corporations seeking to impose their hegemony over the capitalist and developing countries were oriented to large-scale attacks on the rights and living standards of the working people, to impose so-called «austerity» measures, especially through the pressure tactics applied through the International Monetary Fund (IMF), to further increase mass unemployment and through fiscal and monetary policies to increase the share of the big monopolies in the GNP.

«A brutal policy of redistributing national income in favour of big monopolies, at terrible human cost, was being pushed through. A policy of militarization of the economy and militarism was being financed through such schemes of redistribution of incomes.»

The WFTU Bureau noted that all these global aspects of the policies of imperialism, the military-industrial complexes and the TNCs have created a very dangerous situation in the last two years. In fact, the danger signals are now visible to all, with the further escalation of the nuclear arms race set off by the deployment in West Europe of US first-strike nuclear missiles, despite the vehement opposition of the trade union movement in Europe.

In West Europe, along with WFTU and other peace forces, the affiliates of the ICFTU in UK, FRG, Italy and other countries have been engaged in active mobilization for peace, against the arms race and against the deployment of US missiles in their countries. Last year (1983) saw important mass forms of trade union protest actions against the nuclear arms and missile deployment, such as the five-minute work-stoppage in the FRG, and the massive peace rallies in all capital cities.

The political, economic and social consequences of the arms race, on top of the consequences of the worsening capitalist crisis, have now reached an unprecedented scale. The escalation of international tension is now at a new peak, along with the vast accumulation of social problems. All trade unions now recognize that the first task is to stop this drift to destruction, and immediately bring down the level of the stockpiles of nuclear and other mass destruction weapons and to take all steps to eliminate the danger of a nuclear war. The unions are convinced that social development is incompatible with the arms race. Even those ICFTU circles who had earlier argued that «peace and disarmament» are purely «political issues» and not trade union issues now regard the peace issue as the priority task.

On the other hand, the latest budget for the military proposed by Reagan amounts to over 305 billion dollars, about 13 per cent over last year. It is now realized that the ways of financing at such colossal levels (with deficits in US budget reaching 200 billion dollars or more), the policy of high interest rates to attract large volumes of speculative capital into the USA, etc., are causing a heavy drain of investment resources from other capitalist countries. Even the close allies of Washington find that the unilateral decisions of the Reagan Administration and total financial indiscipline are causing great problems for the rest of the capitalist world.

Taking advantage of the fact that the US dollar is agreed to be «reserve currency» of the capitalist world, the US ruling circles are misusing this advantage for their own aggrandisement, to raise the arms budgets and further escalate the nuclear arms race to highly dangerous levels, making the working people of USA and other countries dependent on economic relations with the USA pay the high costs of such unilateral and arbitrary actions.

The policies of unbridled militarist adventures of the Reagan Administration as seen particularly in Lebanon, Central America — and the invasion of Grenada a few months ago — are thus accompanied by a totally unacceptable international behaviour of the USA in relation to the pressing problems of establishing a New International Economic Order, ending the unequal economic relations and upholding the economic independence of countries. These policies are strongly opposed by broader sections of the trade union movement.

One conclusion which can be drawn from this is that a major ideological plan of class collaboration behind a consensus between the capitalist ruling circles and sections of reformist trade union leadership built up since the «cold war» period has been seriously weakened: the argument that the continuous escalation of the nuclear arms race pushed forward by the imperialist ruling circles should have the uncritical support of the trade union leaders.

The crude tricks of the propagandists of the Pentagon of raising a scare about «Soviet threat, every time they want to raise the arms budgets still higher, are now becoming increasingly obvious to the working people.

It is now very difficult for the military-industrial complex to find apologists for them in the ranks of the trade union movement to justify every escalation of the arms race in terms of blind anti-communism. For the simple reason that the workers are less willing to accept such leaders in the trade union movement.

Clearly, it is because of this that the military-industrial complexes and the imperialist ruling circles are forced to fight a rearguard action, to conceal their real aims and even to claim that they are for an end to the arms race. At the same time, they proclaim that «real men are speaking not about arms control but about arms production».

Every effort is made to divide the ranks of the peace forces and to exert pressure on the trade union movement as well as to limit their intervention on peace issues. These efforts must be seen as a deliberate attempt to weaken the growing unity within the ranks of the world trade union movement on the peace issue.

It is therefore rightly stressed by the WFTU and other organizations engaged in the struggle for peace and disarmament that every effort must be made by the trade union movement and peace forces to sharpen the consciousness of all working people on the real implicationis of the arms race and on the real need for arms control and disarmament, to find the resources for economic and social development.

There is a good basis to advance in this direction. The dialogue in trade union ranks which has begun (as seen in the follow up actions on the conclusions of the International Trade Union Conference on Economic and Social Aspects of Disarmament held in Paris in 1981 and the various initiatives of the Dublin Committee, the Round Table of Trade Unionists at the World Assembly for Peace and Life, against Nuclear War held in Prague in June 1983, the International Meeting on «Trade Unions and Peace» held in Sofia in October 1983) on these issues can and must be taken forward.

But even in this Decade of the 1980s — which has been designated as the Third UN Development Decade and the Second UN Disarmament Decade — the close links between the struggle for peace and the struggle for social and economic demands of the workers, the struggle for economic and social development and for a New International Economic Order are still not evident to some sections, including sections of the working people misguided by the rightist elements. As on the question of the arms race, on questions of economic and social policy as well, the right-wing offensive is at its height.

This accentuation of the rightward shift in policy of the capitalist ruling circles is seen in the open denunciation of such concepts as «new deal», «welfare state», etc., and the attempt to take away certain concessions the capitalist rulers had to concede after the Great Depression of the 1930s in terms of collective bargaining rights, minimum wage legislation, social security, etc.

Thus Reagan began his presidency by brutally supressing the strike of air-traffic controllers, withholding wage increases for public service employees, making cuts in government assistance and launching violent attacks on the workers' right to social security.

US employers, for their part, have replaced collective bargaining by «concession bargaining», forcing trade unions to give up wage increases, agree to wage cuts and surrender the gains of earlier struggles.

Big business is running a furious campaign for a «union-free environment», and the union-busting industry in USA is a flourishing private sector industry nowadays.

In contrast, we may point out that under the «New Deal», half century ago, the National Industrial Recovery Act contained important provisions relating to the right of association and collective bargaining and a beginning was made for a social security scheme.

New attacks are planned in the UK by the Thatcher government on trade union rights through the new laws which are being framed for the purpose. It would be appropriate to draw attention in this regard to the latest scandal of the Tory government's action in withdrawing the trade union rights of certain sections of workers in public services in Cheltenham, especially at the insistence of the US Administration.

The rightward shift and intensified exploitation by the monopolies at home and imperialist expansion abroad on the part of Reagan and his allies have only magnified the economic and social consequences of the capitalist crisis. In fact, these social consequences of the rightward shift in policies have reached a new pitch, spurring a new wave of action by workers and trade unions calling for a democratic alternative. The slight recovery from the recession in USA has been endangered by huge budget deficits, high interest rates, the credit squeeze on the working people and developing countries, etc. The capitalist world is under the grip of severe contradictions and on the eve of trade wars.

It must be stressed that the rightward shift in policies of capitalist ruling circles is accompanied by and arises out of the further accentuation of the concentration of economic power in the hands of the transnational corporations and banks and the heightened control they exercise over economic life in the capitalist world.

The 10th Congress rightly stressed the need to develop specific forms of trade union actions against the transnational corporations. Important steps to develop such forms of action have been taken by the WFTU and TUIs and by the ICFTU and the ITSs. However, in contrast with the centralized management and control exercised by the TNCs, the disunity in the ranks of the trade unions — and especially the refusal of the ICFTU and ITSs to develop joint action with other organizations, especially the WFTU and TUIs — prevents an effective response from the world trade union movement. But we can notice that at the rank-and-file level there is an eagerness to establish contacts between workers of TNCs in different countries and we can be sure that this activity will ultimately prevail in promoting united action.

Although the WFTU and TUIs and the WFTU Commission on TNCs have taken very concrete initiatives in the period since the 10th Congress, there is still a long way to go in making the desired progress. One major shortcoming is insufficient coordination with the national trade union centres and their industrial federations, especially in providing prompt solidarity when workers of particular enterprises of TNCs are engaged in struggle. This weakness can and must be overcome through collective efforts.

What is important to stress in this regard is that this activity of co-ordinated action against the TNCs provides new tools to our movement to develop and consolidate trade union action on a global scale.

Another major issue around which international trade union united action must be intensified is the struggle for economic and social development. The World Trade Union Conference on Development in Belgrade in 1980 was a successful joint effort of organizations belonging to

diverse trends. Important initiatives are now being prepared at regional levels on development issues, especially against the background of the 10th anniversary of the UN Declaration for a New International Economic Order which was observed on 1st May 1984.

The International Trade Union Conference for Sanctions and other Actions against Apartheid held in June 1983 in Geneva, under the auspices of the Workers' Group of the ILO and the UN Committee against Apartheid, achieved total unity of the trade union forces — forces belonging to the WFTU, ICFTU and other international and regional organizations. That Conference fully demonstrated the possibilities of joint action by all international and regional trade union organizations, when an appropriate climate and the appropriate forum are created through the joint efforts of all concerned, on an issue of interest and concern to all workers and trade unions.

We can therefore reply to the question: «Are the barriers, which obstruct the progress of united action, now breaking down?», in a positive manner.

But there is still a minority of forces who are not happy at the breaking down of the barriers. These elements, in fact, want to impose some kind of «apartheid» in the trade union movement by claiming their superiority because they work under the strict rules of the «free» world of capitalism and try to imitate the racists in South Africa who justify their brutal repression under their «Suppression of Communism Act».

But these forces are becoming fewer and fewer in number.

We should note in this regard that at its 10th Congress in Toronto in 1981, the ORIT — the regional organization of the ICFTU in the Americas — sought to clear itself from the stigma of the past and **«to remove the frequent misunderstanding that the central mission of the free trade unions is to fight communism.»**

Along with such a repudiation of «cold war» rhetoric, the ORIT also had to take a positive stand on several questions of international solidarity — with Chile, Uruguay, Nicaragua and against the TNCs and the IMF, for a New International Economic Order and in defence of national sovereignty and against the Reagan policies of intervention and aggression in Central America, etc.

Although these declarations have not been accompanied by concrete steps towards united trade union actions at the regional level, they reflect the deep urge of the workers in South, Central and North America to search for new ways to work and this is, indeed, a positive sign.

The important recent initiatives of the Confederation of Mexican Workers (CTM) proposing steps towards regional united action jointly by the ORIT, CPUSTAL and CLAT, have been broadly welcomed in Latin America.

The grave dangers facing humankind in the present time are such that workers and trade unions and all progressive forces must mobilize all their forces and move into action. This is so in the struggle for peace and for an end to the nuclear arms race. This is so in the struggle in defence of jobs and wages, and for global economic cooperation and in the common struggle for social progress.

There cannot be any barriers to such a worldwide united action — all workers and all trade unions must act before it is too late.

III.
UNITY — TO PROMOTE STRONGER SOLIDARITY FOR SUCCESS IN STRUGGLES

The major trade union actions and struggles of 1984, such as the coal-miners' strike in Great Britain against pit closures and in defence of job security, and that of the metal workers in FRG for a 35-hour working week and other strikes have sharply posed the need for stronger solidarity by other trade unions and the need for stronger international solidarity.

Also, in confronting the TNCs, the need for promoting solidarity at trade and industry level, is particularly felt.

These are the questions on which the organizations at the industry and trade level like the Trade Unions Internationals (TUIs) and International Trade Secretariats (ITSs) should concentrate upon and come forward with appropriate initiatives.

At the industrial and trade level, internationally, there has been some progress in united action. The TUIs have played a positive role in promoting unity trends at the level of specific industrial branches and in developing united action against the TNCs. There have been important initiatives by TUIs to organize solidarity around specific struggles and to be present along with the workers in struggle in some cases.

Some significant united initiatives at industrial level have taken place in recent years, on the basis of joint initiatives by industrial level organizations of various affiliations.

Among these are the regional seminars in Europe and Asia of transport workers, in which the unions affiliated to the Transport TUI and the ITF and others participated.

Important progress is also to be seen in the educational sector, where the FISE has developed a large field for united action.

In the graphic arts sector, the International Graphic Federation and the Graphic Arts Committee have organized several joint initiatives.

The broader initiatives at trade level such as the Conference on Peace and Disarmament organized by the Miners and Energy Workers in Moscow in 1983 and the Conference against Chemical and Bacteriological Weapons in Ho Chi Minh City, also in 1983, attracted the participation of a large number of trade union organizations, irrespective of affiliation.

At the level of the ILO and its Industrial Committee, the TUI and ITS affiliates have taken common positions.

Experience of seminars on industrial questions organized by the TUIs has shown that trade unions from industrialized capitalist countires, developing countries and socialist countries can develop fruitful joint actions especially in the sphere of making specific demands concerning the future development of a specific industrial or trade sector, including the problems of technological change, job security, training and retraining and international trade and cooperation. They show the enormous possibilities which exist for developing concrete joint research activities, exchanges of information and for organizing concrete solidarity in support of workers' struggles.

ASPECTS OF REGIONAL AND NATIONAL LEVEL ACTIVITIES

In recent years, there have been many examples showing that common interests can bring together trade unions of different outlooks and orientation and promote united actions at the regional and national levels.

In Europe, this is shown by the European union conferences bringing together national trade union centres from both East and West Europe, and other multilateral trade union activities such as the Workers' Conferences of the Baltic Sea Countries, Norway and Iceland, etc.

In this background, the WFTU's European affiliates have taken important initiatives for contacts and dialogue with all European trade union centres. Appeals were issued from the meetings of WFTU affiliates from European socialist countries held in 1984 for joint actions in the struggle for peace. Important top-level talks have been held on a bilateral basis. All this showed, once again, that at the present time, there are no objective hindrances to the further development of **bilateral relations** between European trade union organizations, whether affiliated to the WFTU, ICFTU or WCL.

Any major improvement in inter-union relations at European level can have a most beneficial impact all over the world since European trade union developments have always had an important role to play in promoting international united actions.

The WFTU and its European affiliates have a positive assessment of the conferences of European trade union centres held so far and their contribution towards better mutual understanding, confidence-building and cooperation in the trade union movement on the continent.

The 4th Conference of European Trade Union Centres held in 1981, as noted earlier, showed the great awareness within the European trade union movement on the dangerous situation created by the arms race and confrontation and the accumulation of social problems while great vistas of progress are opened up by the impetuous development of high technology.

It is a positive sign that in the bilateral exchanges at high level in 1984, fresh initiatives to resume the holding of the Conference of European trade union centres were among the topics discussed.

The WFTU and its European affiliates welcomed the establishment of the **European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC)** as an attempt to move towards greater unity and effectiveness in the European trade union movement. But the ETUC neither could nor would live up to these expectations and has persisted in ostracizing particularly the CGT of France, Intersindical of Portugal, the Workers' Commissions of Spain and the PEO of Cyprus. Such an attitude has weakened the ETUC and its effectiveness and capacity to resist the offensive by the West European monopolies and the TNCs.

The basic industries serving civil needs have been pressed by the authorities in Brussels to restructure and to close down several units, thus creating a huge problem of unemployment. Industry as a whole is reducing jobs. In such a situation, where can new jobs be found? What role in this regard can be played by such sectors of social importance as education, health and culture? Is it possible to solve the problems without defeating the present militarist orientation? Realistic answers must be found.

This situation calls for a new approach and a united response from the entire European trade union movement. Even if it wants to retain its sectarian organizational practices, for which there can be no justification, the ETUC should at least make an effort to discuss with all trade union centres which want to join in concerted or common actions to secure sane economic policies, to prevent the TNCs from turning whole industrial regions into graveyards of industry and, instead, to use the industrial capacity and the skilled manpower to produce goods for the common people within the EEC and for trade with other nations on a basis of equality and mutual benefit. The demands made by the ETUC Conference on Employment (Strasbourg, April 1984) have proved ineffective in fact of the arrogant position of the London economic summit of the leading capitalist states (May 1984).

On this issue, Europe offers good opportunities for cooperation in the interests of each country, and particularly of the workers. It is obvious that an expansion of economic cooperation between capitalist and socialist countries would be mutually beneficial to all parties concerned. It would help the economic and social development of the socialist countries, and it would be a way of creating jobs in the capitalist countries. The steady growth of the internal markets in socialist countries, along with rising purchasing power, are seen as favourable factors for expanding trade — and trade-related jobs as well.

These issues provide a broad and very concrete field for relations and cooperation between the trade unions of Eastern and Western Europe.

It is unfortunate that even within the context of the Lome Conventions, the ETUC, which has tried to organize some consultations with unions in developing countries on the issues involved, has not been able to forcefully denounce the unequal trade and economic relations between the EEC and the countries of the developing world — and neither has it been able to propose any democratic alternative policies upholding the UN Declaration for a New International Economic Order. We may note in this regard that some of the ETUC affiliates have taken progressive positions, far ahead of the official standpoints of the ETUC.

Those who are opposed to trade union united action at the European and international level always find some pretexts to argue against such united action. The differing views about the events in Poland were put forth, for instance, as one such pretext.

No doubt, there are differences in the trade union movement over Poland and many other issues. Life will eventually prove who is right and who is wrong. The Polish workers are effectively dealing with their economic and social problems and freely-elected trade union bodies have been set up, which have already a paid membership of over four million. They consider that the propping up of certain leaders of the former «Solidarnosc» organization abroad by sections within the AFL-CIO and ICFTU amounts to gross interference in the internal affairs of Poland.

Many trade union centres, in the various continents, consider that the former «Solidarnosc» organization was acting as a political opposition and that it was being used to achieve the aims of anti-socialist elements. The actions of the leaders of the former «Solidarnosc» organization confirm this.

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There is a renewed interest in the West to know more about the precise nature of economic and social organization in socialist countries. This was seen in the presence of a large number of trade union delegations from the West at the congresses of trade union centres in socialist countries.

The congresses and various documents of trade union centres in socialist countries have made available to the entire world trade union movement a lot of material on the precise nature of the problems in this regard, including the positive and negative aspects, and on how the problems were overcome. The process of economic planning is itself regarded as a process of continuous development and the key to its success, as has always been stressed, lies in the conscious and active participation of the workers and trade unions in the planning process. The role of trade unions in the economy and society is therefore particularly emphasized.

There is a systematic effort to strengthen statutory and legislative measures to broaden and deepen workers' participation at all levels of the economy. The recent legislation in the Soviet Union and the Bill in Bulgaria need to be specially mentioned in this connection.

Measures are also taken to further enhance the role of trade unions in the efforts to expand social guarantees and enforce the rights and aspirations of citizens for a constant improvement in living standards.

The affiliates of the WFTU in socialist countries have proposed that a World Trade Union Meeting be organized to study their experience. In conditions where there is no private ownership of the main means of production, no transnational corporations nor unemployment, the socialist countries have been trying to maximize the utilization of their productive resources. It is obvious that such a regime of public ownership of the means of production and public distribution, together with participatory planning, have produced good results but this system has to function within the context of a world economy and the active opposition of the capitalist powers. The arms race instigated by imperialism and the current crisis in the capitalist world both have an effect on the economies of the socialist countries as well.

Unfortunately, any serious attempt at understanding the real problems of economic and social development under various social systems is hampered by the intense ideological campaign in Western mass media. This has gone to the ridiculous extent of alleging that countries which have public ownership of the means of production constitute a threat to countries which allow private ownership and control over vital economic sectors.This is the essence of the myth of the «Soviet threat» — a myth which is being persistently built up to justify the nuclear arms race. It is the same myth which builds upon the argument that the nationalization of an industry in public interest as, for example, has been done in France in recent years, is an attack on freedom and a step towards «totalitarianism». Therefore, a correct understanding of the **ideological aspects of the struggle for unity** in Europe and elsewhere in the world thus assume crucial importance today.

In any case, differences which may exist, such as those between social systems, should not be used as an excuse for militarism to settle the issue through a nuclear or conventional war. It is certainly possible to cooperate and clarify these questions through arguments, studies and the concrete experience of nations and peoples.

The developments in other continents as well, show several interesting features.

Considerable activity to improve inter-trade union relations has been going on in the Asian and Pacific region in the recent years. There is a general consensus in the region on the urgent questions of peace and security in Asia and the closely linked issue of economic and social development in the region. The International Conference on the Indian Ocean — Zone of Peace, jointly sponsored by the WFTU and various international non-governmental organizations in 1982, had broad trade union participation from Asia and Africa.

The declarations of the 7th Non-Aligned Summit (1983) in New Delhi on peace, disarmament and development issues were broadly supported by the trade union movements in the region.

The ICFTU has a regional body in Asia — the Asian Regional Organization (ARO). Although the ARO has affiliates in many countries in the region, it has hardly been able alone to make any significant contribution to the development of united trade union action in Asia, particularly on the burning problems of trade union rights and the struggle against the transnational corporations.

Of significance in relation to the development of regional actions are the activities of the trade union centres of Australia, New Zealand, Japan and the Pacific Islands under the «Pacific Trade Union Forum», seeking to mobilize support for a nuclear-free Pacific and also against the nuclear tests and the dumping of nuclear waste in the ocean.

The Committee for International Trade Union Unity in Australia has been striving to mobilize the trade unions in Australia to act positively in favour of promoting united trade union action in Asia and Pacific and at the broad international level.

One of the most successful initiatives of united action in Asia has been the Asian Conference of Transport Workers' Trade Unions held in Japan, through a preparatory committee in which all trends are represented.

The success of this initiative at regional level in the transport sector involving trade unions irrespective of affiliation or orientation, certainly indicates the possibilities for progress in other sectors and on broader regional issues.

Efforts are being made to make progress and the proposal to hold an Asian Trade Union Conference on Development, Economic Cooperation and a New International Economic Order made by fraternal Asian trade union delegates attending the session of the AITUC in Bangalore (December 1983) assumes great importance in this respect. The Conference is to take place in Delhi in 1985 to elaborate the new approaches to the most difficult issues of trade union concern.

A complicating factor in the Asian trade union situation — and not only in Asia — is the multiplicity of trade union centres in most countries of the region. There has been some progress in developing united action at national level in some countries. For example, in India, a National Campaign Committee has been formed by AITUC, HMS, CITU and other centres (except the ITNUC). All the national trade union centres, including the INTUC, have been involved in national level bargaining on wage fixation in steel, coal, etc., and this unity did yield good results for the workers in these industries. At its Congress in December 1983 the AITUC made a number of proposals to promote united action and trade union unity in India.

A major weakness in regional united action is the inadequacy of concerted and united efforts by the trade union forces in Asia against the serious attacks on trade union rights in several countries of Asia and the Pacific.

The situation in Pakistan, Bangladesh, Thailand and south Korea, which are under various types of military regimes armed and equipped by the imperialist ruling circles, is notorious for the suppression of trade union and democratic rights. It is also notorious that the military build-up in these countries with US arms supplies has caused grave concern among their neighbours and is seen as a situation which gravely endangers peace and security in the region.

The trade union movements in Asia and Pacific have inherited a rich heritage of struggle for national independence against imperialism and colonialism and for peace and social progress. There is a growing realization in Asia that the mighty forces of the trade union movement in Asia should be mobilized in a united and concerted manner to defend the issues and interests of Asian workers, upholding the famous Bandung principles of peaceful coexistence, and promoting economic and social development in the region.

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The developments in **Latin America** in recent years show that workers' struggles have advanced on all fronts. Imperialism and the oligariches are making desperate moves, waging an undeclared war on Nicaragua, stepping up provocations against Cuba, intensifying the repression in Chile, Salvador, Honduras, Uruguay, Guatemala, etc., in order to halt the rising upsurge of people's struggles for their democratic rights.

Latin America also provides the classic example of the collapse of the strategies of neo-colonialism and lopsided industrialization under the hegemony of transnational corporations. The indebtedness of countries such as Mexico, Brazil, Argentina, etc., the growing inability of these countries to service this debt and the total collapse of their development strategies have brought about a situation in which radical new approaches, in terms of independent economic development oriented to people's needs (and not the profits of the TNCs), have become a compelling necessity for the countries of the region. The isolation of fascist regimes, as in Chile and Uruguay, especially after the collapse of the military regimes in Bolivia and Argentina, is leading to new tasks and new methods of struggles.

The workers' actions against the consequences of the crisis and the popular struggle for democratic rights and against the exploitation of their countries by the transnational corporations, especially from the USA, are making a profound impact on trade union attitudes, and having a positive influence on the trends towards united action.

In a number of countries in Latin America, the trade union movement has effectively set up coordination bodies and joint action fronts between national centres of different international affiliation to defend trade union and democratic rights and to promote workers' demands.

In order to mobilize workers and people against imperialist aggression in Nicaragua and El Salvador, trade unions belonging to the CPUSTAL, ORIT and autonomous centres held a meeting in Panama on 13-14 December 1983, hosted jointly by all the national trade union centres of Panama. A second meeting for this purpose is being held in Mexico City, hosted by the Mexican Labour Congress. Active work in this field is being carried out by the Central American Committee on Trade Union Unity (CUSCA), founded by the CPUSTAL.

Colombia has a rich experience of united action, with agreement on joint action between various workers' centres and non-confederated organizations. The CONATO of Panama, comprising all trade unions in the country, is a coordinating body for unity of action. The National Trade Union Coordinating Body (CNS) and the National Workers' Command (CNT) in Chile have drawn together all the country's trade union organizations. In Uruguay, the «Inter-Union Workers' Plenary» (PIT) expresses the continuity and the deep roots of unity and class-oriented traditions of the National Workers' Convention (CNT). The Caribbean Trade Union Unity Committee brings together all workers in the Caribbean area into united action. The Andean Labour Council which was formed in July 1983 reflects the deep desire for united action expressed in Latin America today.

However, it has to be recognized that unity trends are still not strong enough to respond to the present situation, both in terms of needs and possibilities. The rate of organization of workers in trade unions, as a national average, is low and in terms of day-to-day struggles the fact of trade union division is a sordid reality hampering the effectiveness of struggles. It is well known that the disruptive forces are well-financed and that the AFL-CIO and its American Institute for Free Labor Development (AIFLD) are financed by funds provided by the US State Department and the TNCs. This funding for disruption, it can be said, directly contravenes ILO Convention 87 on freedom of association, on account of the external interference in the internal affairs of trade union bodies. Like the undeclared war on Nicaragua, this interference is an undeclared intervention in the Latin American trade union movement in the name of promoting «free» trade unionism. In any case, how free are the trade unions if their day-to-day work is crudely interfered with by forces working for the transnational corporations and imperialism?

Such questions are now coming from the rank and file and the regional organizations concerned have to reply to them and play their due role.

Some contacts took place recently between ORIT and CPUSTAL officials but these have not been followed up since. The CLAT-WCL's regional organization — cannot also stay outside these developments and the real wishes of its own members.

Interesting forms and structures expressive of the new unity in action have emerged in several countries in Latin America, overcoming the old patterns of division for ideological reasons.

The WFTU highly appreciates its close fraternal cooperation with CPUSTAL and its affiliated organizations. The CPUSTAL celebrates its 20th anniversary this year. The message of unity of Latin American workers which came out of the Brasilia Congress of the CPUSTAL in 1964 has mobilized the broad forces of the trade union movement in the region in massive solidarity actions. The experience of the last 20 years has certainly brought very rich lessons to the trade union movement in Latin America. Above all, that imperialism and the TNCs cannot crush the spirit of resistance to oppression, that the struggles will grow despite fascist methods and mercenary military dictators, that despite all obstacles, unity of workers and trade unions in Latin America is advancing.

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The important developments in US and Canada need particular attention. The English-speaking mainland of the North American continent, with its French-speaking, Spanish-speaking and Afro-American minorities, constitutes the central world stronghold of the transnational corporations and the power base of their worldwide operations of repression, intimidation and subversion.

In this TNC «paradise», the trade unions of both US and Canada have been engaged in a growing struggle against plant closings, wage-cuts and attacks on contractual guarantees and working conditions and to assert their trade union rights.

An active struggle is growing for a policy of militancy within the labour movement itself, and against the discredited policies of collaboration with the employers, which has brought only passivity and decline — for the AFL-CIO membership dropped from 35 per cent of the labour force in 1945 to less than 20 per cent in 1983.

In the US, beginning with the militant March on Washington of 10,000 miners in the first months of the Reagan Administration, the repressive acts of the government have met with a determined resistance which continues to grow. The massive anti-Reagan mobilization in Washington of 19 September 1981 — SOLIDARITY DAY — of over half a million, was called by the AFL-CIO in response to demands from trade unionists from all over the country. For the first time in its history, the labour federation used its funds and its organizational structure to help mobilize mass pressure. The success of the SOLIDARITY DAY put new life into the orgnization. Together with labour in the protest were the main organizations of the Afro-American, Puerto Rican, Latin-American and other minorities, peace groups, pensioners and youth.

Though this by no means changed the hardened attitudes of the top leadership of the AFL-CIO, the organization soon began to speak of «labour and its allies» for the first time in its history.

Labour coalitions with community forces, chiefly based on local and regional labour councils of the AFL-CIO began to form all over the country. These have grown and increased their activity, fighting against Reagan cuts in benefits and against plant closings, etc. Though the fight against plant closings has been defensive and is still unsuccessful, this has led to an intensified struggle at the policy-making level. Top union leaders have begun to call for legislation to control plant closings and the outflow of capital and also to raise the question of international collective bargaining with the TNCs. The joint action regionally with peace forces helped produce the change that brought the majority of AFL-CIO unions to endorse the nuclear freeze proposal.

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Problems of unity in **Africa and the Middle East** have broad similarities and — what is most important to our present discussion — because of the central fact that organic trade union unity at regional level exists in both

cases through the OATUU and the ICATU. The WFTU has always had fruitful fraternal cooperation with both these organizations and its affiliates in these regions are also affiliates of the united regional organizations.

However, while appreciating the positive achievement of organic unity, one cannot overlook the severe problems confronted by the trade union movements in both these regions and particularly, the difficult situation concerning trade union rights and, accompanying it, the low level of activity of the trade unions. The trade unions in most countries of Africa and the Middle East are facing tremendous problems in establishing the basic structures and training facilities.

Both in Africa and the Middle East, trade union activity has become inseparable from the struggle against imperialism and neocolonialism and their allies and partners — the racist apartheid regime in South Africa and the zionist expansionist regime in Israel. Propping up both the Pretoria and Tel Aviv regimes are the big transnational corporations and banks and the strategic alliance between all these forces is now operating in full force against the workers and peoples of Africa and the Middle East.

It has also to be stressed that several very important issues of struggles in Africa and the Middle East are international in dimension and have built around them a strong international solidarity movement. The world trade union united action achieved through the anti-apartheid conferences held under the auspices of the Workers' Group of the ILO and the UN are most significant in this regard. However, we must point out that in the follow-up actions to these conferences, the necessary level of unity among the various trends in the world trade union movement still remains to be achieved.

There have been widespread struggles in the recent period in Tunisia and Morocco over rises in prices of essential commodities, because of policies imposed at the insistence of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the transnational banks. Nowhere is the havoc caused by imperialism and neocolonialism on people's lives so brutally evident as in Africa, as is the total grip of the transnational corporations and banks on the basic export commodities of Africa. The FAO has reported that many African countries are now facing acute food problems, with millions of people facing famine conditions. It is therefore extremely urgent that the real issues of exploitation, poverty and famine in Africa are explained before world public opinion and international efforts should be initiated to stop the brutal methods of plunder of Africa. In this regard, the WFTU has fully supported the OATUU initiative to organize a Regional Conference in Africa on Problems of Development, with particular reference to the problems of agriculture and possible solutions to the food problem.

The WFTU and the OATUU organized in May 1984 an International Conference on Solidarity with the Workers and Peoples of Southern Africa, in order to further intensify the actions the world over against the apartheid regime. Participating in this Conference were trade union centres from all continents.

The WFTU works closely with the ICATU in mobilizing international solidarity in support of the struggle of the Palestinian people, against the US and Israeli intervention in Lebanon and their threats against Syria and for forging the unity of workers and trade unions in Arab countries for their rights, for the economic and social development of their countries and for peace in the region and the world. Regular meetings at high level have been held to exchange views and to plan concrete initiatives. Both the organizations have agreed to develop joint activity concerning the problems of immigrant workers.

The suspension of the affiliation of the UGTT of Tunisia to the ICFTU after the Oslo Congress in 1983 revealed the acute policy differences inside the ICFTU on problems concerning the Middle East. Great resentment has also been expressed the world over at the activities of sections in the AFL-CIO and some other ICFTU affiliates to prop up so-called «unions» acceptable to the apartheid regime in Pretoria. Certain collusion between these sections and the TNCs operating in South Africa appears likely since these forces pay no heed to enforcing UN sanctions against the apartheid regime and are clearly acting contrary to the decisions of the international trade union anti-apartheid conferences. It is necessary to expose and isolate these disruptive elements.

All the organizations which participated in the anti-apartheid trade union conferences in Geneva should seek ways to intensify their action in a coordinated manner, to enforce the UN sanctions against the apartheid regime in South Africa, especially an oil and arms embargo.

IV.
THE LESSONS AND TASKS

It is now ten years since the bubble burst, the «economic miracles» lost their halo and many fond and facile assumptions simply exploded or vanished, with the crisis of the 1970s confronted by the capitalist world.

In the industrialized capitalist countries, the last ten years have seen the emergence of severe social problems, particularly mass unemployment, the wholesale restructuring of industries and redeployment by the big monopolies and transnational corporations. Its impact on developing countries was more tragic.

The trade union movement in many of these countries faced setbacks and loss in membership because of closures of factories and sharp decline in employment. In some countries, authoritarian and even fascist forces are on the offensive.

But the workers fought back against the attacks of the capitalist bosses on their jobs and wages and for their vital human rights. Wherever the unity is strong, the struggles have ended in success.

These struggles called for a serious review and reassessment of strategy — particularly on how to unite the forces of the trade unions to confront the global strategy of the transnational banks and corporations.

This need for a broader unity and the ways to realize such a unity are issues which have become the most urgent issues now. In fact, they have become life-and-death questions for the workers and trade unions since if they do not gather the necessary strength to resist the attacks on them launched by the monopolies and transnational corporations and their people in government, the bosses will succeed in realizing their dream of having a «union-free environment». In such a situation, the position taken by some trade union leaders in Brussels against unity and united action is most incongruous.

It is notorious that the IMF asks countries to impose anti-trade union legislation along with forced reduction of real wage standards and cuts in social services as a condition for loans. And the imposition of such conditions led to huge mass protests and many precious lives were lost because of the repression.

Collective bargaining is being turned into «concession bargaining» — the pound of flesh asked by the capitalist bosses, forcing unions to surrender the past gains of struggles, accept wage-cuts and a fall in living standards.

There is now a growing realization among all trends in the world trade union movement that the «economic summit» meetings of the leaders of the home states of the main transnational corporations are no more than propaganda exercises and that no serious efforts will be made by them to deal with the problem of unemployment and other social issues.

On the other hand, financing the arms race is the first priority for these leaders.

The arms build-up, far in excess of real needs of defence and security, is now clearly seen as a deliberate strategy to acquire the military superiority to impose total economic domination, to reverse the processes of national liberation and social progress.

Thus, as against these dangerous developments, among the trade unions, there is a growing general consensus to stress the genuine interests of the working class and the indivisible link between the struggle against the arms race and the struggle against the mismanagement and misappropriation of resources by the monopolies, banks and transnational corporations.

It is recognized that a realistic strategy for unity and united action in defence of working class interests at the present time is to promote international solidarity, strengthen unity not only from below, but strengthen the process of united action at trade and industrial level, promote more concrete activity at the level of specific transnational corporations, explore possibilities to promote united actions at the regional level on different issues, and above all, to further strengthen and consolidate the growing united action on the issues of peace, to avert a nuclear war, to bring about disarmament and to insist on using the resources now wasted on the arms race to serve the urgent needs of economic and social development.

Based on these considerations, the WFTU Bureau at its meeting in Paris in April 1984 adopted the following final document.

V.

UNITY AND UNITED ACTION OF TRADE UNIONS MORE VITAL THAN EVER

(Document adopted by the 31st session of the WFTU Bureau)

The 31st session of the WFTU Bureau, held in Paris from 9-11 April 1984, devoted an important part of its work to studying present problems of the development of unity.

This is not a new concern. It is inscribed in the events of the WFTU's entire history since its foundation, which, in itself, was the result of a profound desire for unity of the workers who, during the last World War and after it had ended, wanted to give themselves a means of joining together and taking action to stop such disasters ever happening again in the future. The 10th World Trade Union Congress was fully involved in this passionate search.

However, we are returning to this again today because there are serious and important reasons motivating our insistence and this solemn appeal which the WFTU is addressing to all workers and the world trade union movement as a whole.

We believe strongly that the determination of the workers and peoples will be capable of expressing itself with sufficient amplitude in order to solve the huge problems faced by humanity. But in order to achieve this, there must be:

— unity and united action by the workers and their trade union organizations.

This is the key to the future of humanity.

Particularly worrying are the factors challenging us today. No worker, whether woman, man or young person, and no trade union worthy of the name can remain aside.

The responsibility of each and every one is involved.

— The aggressive strategy of imperialism has launched humanity in a frantic arms race, recently aggravated by the installation of the new US missiles in Europe. The stockpiles of armaments would be enough, according to experts, to destroy all life on this planet several times over. Billions and billions, syphoned away from the workers' creative activity, are disappearing into the research and production of weapons designed to kill. While there is so much to be done for life, poverty kills 40,000 children every day;

— millions of workers are deprived of jobs and cannot exercise that fundamental right: the right to work. Their number is increasing unabated;

— millions of people are living, or rather vegetating, below what is termed the «poverty line». Millions of others are suffering and dying because of hunger;

— through exploitation by the transnational companies and imperialism, many countries are being maintained in a state of under-development to such an extent that alienates their independence and sovereignty, prevents them from providing a decent life for their people and confines them to poverty and backwardness;

— fundamental rights and freedoms are being continuously flouted in several countries. Trade union activists are being imprisoned, executed, abducted and are dying under torture.

Workers are struggling against these evils. The means do exist to overcome them. The huge profits of giant capitalist companies and the amounts of money swallowed up by the arms race could usefully serve the well-being of mankind and economic and social development.

We know that throughout the world workers are ardently yearning for unity and are looking for ways to achieve it. When they do achieve it, the results greatly benefit them, be it in their places of work or at national level. That is why the WFTU Bureau is determined to achieve it.

To solve these huge problems we have just dealt with, the WFTU gauges all progress made in this field by the growth in bilateral and multilateral relations between trade union organizations in various countries. These contribute to greater understanding between workers and between peoples and help find agreements for joint actions and work.

This is good, it is encouraging, but it is still not enough to meet the needs of the situation.

So what is it, then, which stands in the way of progress which could be decisive?

Is it the absence of common objectives?

If we look at the programmes of national, regional , continental or world trade union organizations, we can find broad convergences.

It is possible to find agreement among all trade union organizations on such sensitive questions and decisive aims, such as:

— a halt to the arms race and, in particular, the nuclear arms race;

— the creation of the conditions for new international negotiations leading to a balanced reduction of armaments to the lowest possible level, both in East and West;

— the solution by negotiation of all matters of contention between states;

— the establishment of a New International Economic Order encouraging the economic and social development of all countries;

— effective measures to control the activities of transnational corporations;

— the diversion to peaceful ends of the enormous sums ear-marked at present for weapons;

— the quest for measures to check unemployment and create jobs for all and to improve living conditions.

Of course, there are obstacles in the way of united action towards these goals, but are they insurmountable?

For our part, we are ready to talk about them calmly with everyone, with the intention of understanding and achieving results.

What are the considerations put forward nowadays for holding back, or even preventing dialogue?

It would be difficult to meet or come to an understanding with the WFTU because it is not «independent», they say. Naturally we reject such an argument. The WFTU is made up of sovereign organizations which formulate its trade union policy in an open and sovereign manner. All those who wished to follow the work of our last Congress, the composition of which went well beyond the WFTU members, could convince themselves that this is true.

It would be difficult to have relations with the trade unions of the socialist countries because, it is argued, «they are not genuine trade unions and, furthermore, are not independent». We could say a lot about the many important rights enjoyed by these unions. But we can point out that all over the world trade unions, although they have many aspects and goals in common, differ from each other. Their history and traditions have modelled them according to the needs of the workers who created and developed them. Some of them have special relationships with this or that party, and not only in the socialist countries. Others maintain that they are independent. We believe that this is the business of the workers of each country and these specific features need not form any obstacle to unity.

We must be able to accept each other with all our differences. The trade unions from the socialist countries affiliated to the WFTU are ready to pursue the debate. In their united approach they propose, in particular, the holding of an international trade union forum for the discussion of everything related to the life, concepts, activities and prerogatives of the trade unions of the socialist countries.

The events in Poland are often raised to justify the refusal of dialogue for joint initiatives. Frankly, we believe that it is not right to make everyone bear what is, above all, the responsibility of the Polish trade unions and which can only be settled by the workers of Poland and their trade unions.

It is quite understandable that we have different opinions on this and other questions. But what stops us from discussing them? None of the great problems facing the trade unions of the world today seem insurmountable to us, provided the determination to succeed exists.

We at the WFTU want to make even greater efforts. The 10th World Trade Union Congress called us to this continuous search to make the WFTU more active, more effective, simultaneously more flexible and still closer to the workers' realities and aspirations. We have embarked on this road. It is leading us, naturally, to seek unity with even greater fervour and perseverance, with the concern of harmonizing everything possible without intervening in individual trade union affairs.

Therefore we are appealing for a sustained effort by everyone, by all international, regional and national trade union organizations. We are appealing to workers in all countries, on all continents, in all trades and in the same transnational company to use all their influence to create the conditions for dialogue and unity of action among all trade unions at all levels.

Paris, 11 April 1984

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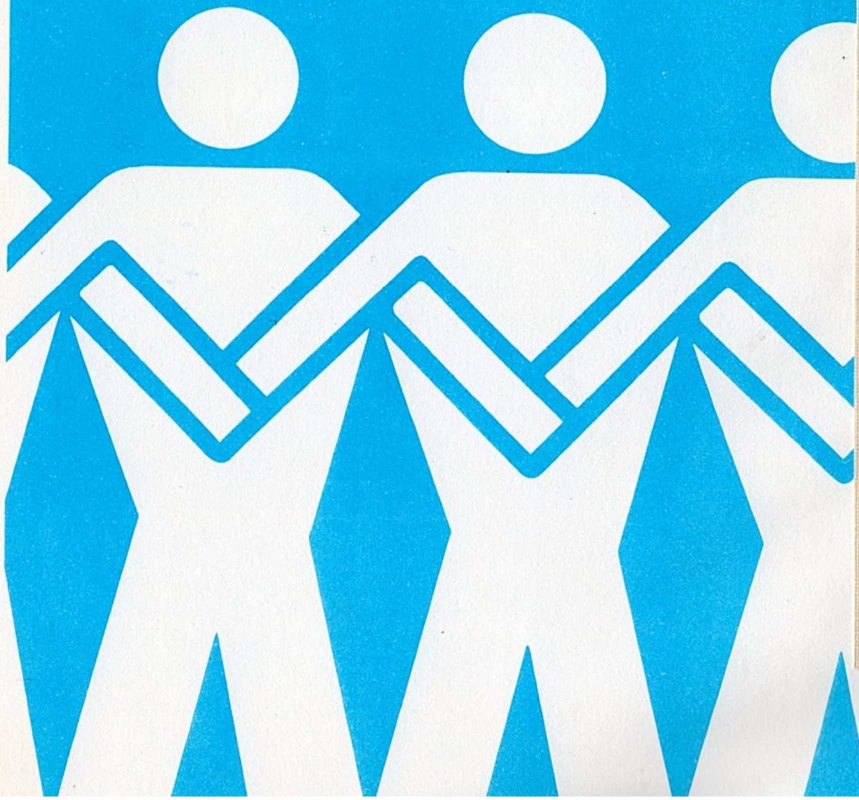

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